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# Protection and Corruption

By G. H. PERRIS



CASSELL AND COMPANY, LTD.  
London, New York, Toronto and Melbourne  
1910



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## Protection and Corruption

### I.—THE HISTORY OF A TRUST.

IN 1802 two cousins named Frederick and William Havemeyer crossed the Atlantic from Germany, and settled down in the village of Greenwich, which was afterwards absorbed in the city of New York. There they established a sugar-loaf "bakery," a little house in what is now Vandam Street, where they slept and carried on their business. In those days, the production of native sugar in the recently liberated and united colonies was very small; but already the duty of 1 cent per lb. on raw and 3 cents on refined of the first Federal Tariff Act had been three times raised. It now stood at 5 cents on raw and 18 cents on refined, the definite intention being to "tax the Britisher." The advantage this penalty gave to rising houses of refiners like that of the Havemeyers at the consumers' cost led to a reduction of the duties to 3 cents and 10 cents in 1816, and the reduced rate continued until 1842. The "infant" industry was then so well established that Frederick Havemeyer had become president of the greatest non-governmental bank in the country, and, when he died in 1861, left an estate of £600,000; while William was thrice mayor of New York.

Sugar seems to have lent itself to fraud from the very beginning. In those days there was no polariscope test of saccharine strength, and the grading of the duties invited dishonest ingenuity. Syrup, for instance, having to be subjected to refining processes, was scheduled at

a very low rate. The refiners were, therefore, wont to take a cask of raw Cuban sugar, pour into it a few gallons of water, sufficient to enable them to pass it off as syrup, and so get through the Customs at one-tenth of the proper duty. They would then export the refined product, and obtain "drawback" at the full sugar tariff scale. It was upon dodges of this kind, as well as on a genius for tariff-mongering and stock jobbing and a thorough knowledge of the processes of manufacture, that Henry Havemeyer, son of Frederick, founded a fortune of 50 millions sterling, and built up a machinery which has been estimated to take the enormous sum of 28 millions sterling a year of artificial profit out of the pockets of the American people. The Havemeyers were established in New York, and depended, in the main, upon oversea supplies of raw beet and cane sugar. Their monopoly was threatened on the south by the Louisiana cane sugar industry, and on the west by the hardly less daring genius of the Spreckels family of San Francisco, marketing Hawaiian supplies, which, for political reasons, were admitted free of duty. The Louisiana competition was temporarily extinguished by the Civil War. With Claus Spreckels and his sons, the Havemeyers had to fight a long and bitter campaign. The old traditions were first of all exhausted.

In 1876 the wholesale corruption of Customs officials in New York by the Havemeyer firm had become a national scandal, and was the subject of investigation by a committee of Congress, when it was found that the systematic undervaluing of sugar imports for duty had cost the revenue in two years over two and a half million pounds sterling. Fifteen years later, and again in 1909, similar frauds by the Sugar Trust were unveiled. The Secretary of the Treasury estimated that, in three years, 1883 to 1886, the Government was robbed in the New



York Customs sugar entries to the extent of £800,000. This is the crudest kind of application of capitalist ingenuity to the exploitation of a Protective tariff. Of course, it was not in itself sufficient. The organisation of the Sugar Trust in 1887 and the following years is one of the most extraordinary stories in the annals of modern trade and finance. It has yet to be fully told, but enough is known of the campaign of intimidation, intrigue, financial dodgery, tariff twisting, parliamentary bribery, and hide-and-seek with the law—all of it based upon the Protectionist tariff—to immortalise the name of Havemeyer, and to have caused any people save one that had an unworked continent for compensation to set upon the tariff and destroy it outright.

First of all, other Eastern refiners were frightened by the threat of Western and a revived Southern competition into ranking themselves under the Havemeyer flag, in 1887, as the "Sugar Refineries Company," with a total capitalisation of £1,350,000—a sum which was at once watered to £10,000,000, and, a few years later, to £18,000,000. It may be asked how it was possible to pay 10 per cent. dividends on this watered stock. Economy of production, due in part to the closing down of minor concerns, obviously does not account for it. It can, in fact, only be accounted for by the success of the Trust in crushing out competition, and then raising prices to the full extent which the tariff permitted. It is said that, in the first year of the combine, which had united seventeen corporations, the difference between the cost of raw sugar and the selling price of refined was raised by 66 per cent., although the cost of production was actually lowered. This advance was for a time affected by the feud with Spreckels; and the whole existence of the Trust was threatened by the agitation for a reduction of the tariff in 1890. But, as Mr. J. C.

Welliver, the best American authority on this subject, has shown, Henry Havemeyer was just the man for a desperate situation: "If a huge fraud against the revenues were to be perpetrated, if the Customs officials were to be bribed, or a Senator was to be bought, or a railroad to be forced into a rebating agreement, or the city water mains were to be surreptitiously connected with a Sugar Trust plant so that it could get its water supply free, Havemeyer had the courage to arrange it all, to keep his own counsel, to take the chances all to himself."

Two lines of attack had to be met. The first was the popular movement for tariff revision. Here Havemeyer's strategy was so simple that, as we look back upon it, we might be tempted to suppose the American people singularly easy to dupe, were it not that we recall the little less humiliating history of our own part in the Brussels Sugar Convention. Havemeyer was all for a certain kind of cheap sugar; the lowering of the duties suited the refining business perfectly well so long as raw imports were more favourably treated than foreign refined supplies. It was this "differential," as the Americans call it, which secured the Sugar Trust from foreign competition; and it was therefore this in which they were mainly interested. Nobody on the consumers' side, with a tenth part of Havemeyer's shrewdness and power, saw that this was the central point of the contest. So, when the great magnate protested that he was all in favour of free raw sugar imports—which had the additional advantage of checking the competition of Louisiana and San Francisco—the man in the street was completely deceived. (Louisiana had ultimately to be bought off with a bounty.) But when the 1890 tariff came into effect, it was found that the average price of raw sugar fell by 1.68 cents, while that of refined sugar

fell by only 1.5 cents; so that the refiners had an additional advantage in the end of about 18 per cent., which, on the sales of 1891, is reckoned to have meant an increased profit of about one million sterling, or just enough to pay a 10 per cent. dividend on the ten millions of capital of the Sugar Trust. It is a really fine instance of tariff fleecing. One-fifth of a halfpenny per lb. seems such a trivial matter to the retail buyer, but over the whole area of a continental trade it means a difference of a million pounds in a year. Indeed, it meant more at a later date, for the reduction of prices led to an immediate increase of consumption. It must not be supposed that Mr. Havemeyer was at the trouble to stump the constituencies to obtain this "deal." Not at all: it is much easier to go to Washington to make a partnership with a Senator of first-class ability, and to "salt the lobby."

This process was well under way in June, 1890, when the second blow of the enemy fell upon the Sugar Trust, in the form of a decree of the New York Court of Appeals, at the instance of Tammany Hall, holding the Trust to be illegal, and ordering it to be dissolved. In the following month the Sherman Anti-Trust Act, the most sweeping measure of its kind, was carried through Congress; and for a moment the new millionaire-dom appeared to be doomed. But America has its preserves for financiers as well as for divorcees. Mr. Havemeyer quietly retired to the State of New Jersey, and rechristened the Sugar Refineries Company as the American Sugar Refining Company, with himself as president. The Sherman Law was at once put into operation; but the Government placed its case against the company as a conspiracy to restrain inter-State trade so badly before the Supreme Court that the Trust was now declared to be legal; and this judgment opened the

way for a whole series of great trust combinations, and was accepted as virtually destroying the Sherman Law. The Steel Trust (with a capital of £280,000,000), the Smelting Trust and Rubber Trust (each with a capital of £20,000,000), the Amalgamated Copper Company, the American Woollen Company, the Leather Trust, the Tobacco Trust, the Powder Trust, and others, followed in the path which Mr. Havemeyer had driven. In more recent years, the Sugar Trust has obtained a controlling interest in many American beet sugar companies; and since the war of 1898, the result of which threatened its very existence, it has bought up large interests in Cuba, with a corresponding influence in Congress.

In 1892 the Democrats were successful, and Mr. Cleveland came into office. The Sugar Trust was popularly believed to have contributed £100,000 to the Democratic Campaign Fund, in preparation for eventualities. Having assured its legal position, having roped in Mr. Spreckels, and absorbed 98 per cent. of the sugar refining trade of the country, it now demanded a new dose of protection, and obtained, in fact, a duty of 40 per cent. *ad valorem*. The whole country was scandalised; and, while the Press rang with stories of Senatorial bribery, a committee of investigation was established. Many witnesses refused to give information, and although one Havemeyer broker was sent to gaol for contempt for two months, Mr. Havemeyer himself was allowed to refuse to testify. President Cleveland, declaring that it was "perfidy and dishonour," refused to sign the Tariff Act, which became law without his signature. If possible, the story of the Dingley Law, in 1897, is still more shocking. The Sugar Trust was again one of the largest contributors to the electoral campaign funds; but this time it was the Republicans who had to pay toll. The sugar duty was doubled; and so confident

was Mr. Havemeyer of his success that, by importing all the stocks he could get hold of at the old rate and holding them till the new schedules came into force, he was enabled to take this additional toll, it is said, on something like 800,000 tons of sugar, in 1898, making a profit which has been estimated at £5,000,000 sterling on this single coup.

So much for Henry Havemeyer, dead in the odour of sanctity. But his spirit still "goes marching on." In the summer of 1907, an old servant of the American Sugar Refining Company gave information to the Government which revealed long-continued frauds on an unprecedented scale. By manipulation of the weighing machines at the docks of the Havemeyer and Elder refinery in Brooklyn (the largest in the world), payment of duty had been evaded on no less than 75,000,000 lbs. of sugar in the six years 1901-7. The thefts represented about £250,000. Proof was incontrovertible; the defence was that no responsible official of the company was guilty. Further charges followed, and the company paid the Government, in the spring of 1909, a sum of £400,000 in restitution. In the following summer the Trust was again the object of Government proceedings, this time under the Sherman Law. An independent refining company in Philadelphia had brought successful action against it on the ground that, by trickery, the Trust had got this competing business in its clutches, and had then closed it down. The Trust had settled the suit by a payment of £2,000,000. Having, as a body, taken responsibility in this affair for the acts of its officers, it was now prosecuted by the Government; and, on July 1, a Federal Grand Jury found the American Sugar Refining Company, its president (Mr. W. B. Thomas—Henry Havemeyer had died two years earlier) and five directors, guilty of an unlawful and corrupt conspiracy in restraint

of trade. Still the Trust was not suppressed; but in the autumn of 1909 indictments were prepared against its officials as a sequel to the Customs frauds, and in February, 1910, a further £120,800 was paid in restitution. Altogether the Government recovered nearly £700,000 from three New York concerns on account of weighing frauds. This, however, did not affect the criminal prosecution of the persons responsible. In May, 1910, the United States Supreme Court decided that Mr. C. K. Heike, secretary of the Trust, should stand his trial; and he and other officers have since been sentenced to terms of imprisonment.

There lies before me a conventional book of biographies of "Millionaires and Kings of Enterprise." It ignores the facts cited above; but it notes that Mr. Havemeyer presented a public school to the town of Greenwich, Connecticut, at a cost of £50,000, and that Mr. Claus Spreckels, on making peace with the Trust in 1892, gave a "thank-offering" of a million dollars to each of his four children!

I have thought it better to outline the whole history of this monstrous child of the American Tariff than to offer miscellaneous evidence of the corrupting effect of Protection in the largest field in which it is applied in the modern world. Much of this general evidence will be found in the paper addressed to the International Free Trade Congress of 1908 by Mr. Franklin Pierce, of New York. Mr. Pierce describes the process of party bribery by the payment into the campaign funds, from associations of manufacturers, bankers, insurance companies, and other bodies dependent upon or connected with the great monopolies, of moneys which are then disposed of in the wholesale purchase of votes in State and Federal elections. Mr. Pierce quotes an estimate that about one million pounds sterling was thus contributed to the Republican

party in the Presidential campaign of 1896; and in 1900, and again in 1904, millions of dollars were collected by the Republican "bosses" from the beneficiaries of the tariff. The result is a wholesale demoralisation of American political life. The example of the millionaires, a general subject of discussion in the daily press, excites everywhere among lesser folk a similar greed for speculative and unearned gain. The habit of initiative and self-reliance, the belief in honesty and hard work, are undermined. Legislation is hasty and careless, while the large surpluses which are incidental to an extreme Protectionism lead to the squandering of public money and a contempt for honest finance. In the periodic revulsions of feeling which the country suffers, appeals are made for an autocratic use of Presidential powers which is subversive of the spirit of the American Constitution.

Plutocracy has, in fact, become shameless. Mr. J. D. Rockefeller, junior, the Standard Oil magnate, on February 6th, 1903, sent the following characteristic telegram to six United States senators: "We are opposed to any anti-Trust legislation. Our counsel will see you. It must be stopped." Mr. Havemeyer openly avowed to the Senate Committee of Inquiry that his Trust paid money to the dominant party in each State, whichever it was, "because that is the party which controls the local matters"; and the only excuse that he offered was that every similar corporation did the same thing.

"The alliance," says Mr. Franklin Pierce, "between our captains of industry and politicians for private gain is a standing menace to political morality. We have deliberately given to our legislators the power, by Congressional enactment, of transferring, through Protective tariffs, millions of dollars from the hands of the people to the pockets of a few industrial leaders. By restricting foreign competition these colossal combinations have been

permitted to spring up and to become stronger than Congress and the President, and more persistent than any general public opinion. They are growing more and more powerful every day to fight for their advancement. The protected monopoly strikes down the small manufacturer, turns tens of thousands of independent dealers into mere workmen, creates a kind of feudal state with the whole country dependent upon it, and seeks to add millions to its already acquired millions through Tariff Acts, ship subsidies, and other special legislation. Behind every tariff law will be found nothing but private interests, clinging like parasites to the Government, constantly urging their claims, and seeking by discreditable means to interest Senators and Representatives in the passage of their measures. The Tariff problem in the United States to-day, with its resulting Trusts, has proved the most stupendous instrument of corruption which was ever conceived by the ingenuity of man.

“The Trust magnates own the mines and minerals; they own a considerable part of the remaining forest lands; they control the great railway systems; they control the majority of manufactories, and hold the franchises of the cities. Through these acquisitions they have become the rulers of our Republic without holding any office whatever. The people are slow to see the danger of such vast and irresponsible power exercised by a few men, because they plot in secret and mine and countermine our public life. Eventually, if they are not stopped, they will reduce the American people to servitude.”



## II.—THE “RED PARLOUR” OF TORONTO.

THE Dominion of Canada has shown during the last thirty years a similar morbid development. Up to 1876 both of the great parties, called Liberal and Conservative, were in favour of Free Trade, any element of Protection in the revenue tariff being small and incidental. After a prolonged period of trade depression, the Conservatives came into power at the elections of 1878 (which the Liberal leader, Alexander Mackenzie, described as a carnival of fraud and misrepresentation); and Sir John Macdonald at once established what was called the National Policy of high Protection, with the reduction of imports as an avowed object, and the open invitation: “Let each manufacturer tell us what he wants, and we will try and give him what he needs.” Macdonald had been involved five years earlier in the grossest political scandal that had ever afflicted a modern British Parliament. In return for payments by Sir Hugh Allan, amounting to nearly 400,000 dollars to the Conservative campaign funds in 1873, Allan had received a charter for the Canadian Pacific Railway. The transaction becoming known, Macdonald was practically driven from Parliament; and it took him the following four years to rehabilitate himself. Before the British General Election of 1909, the *Daily Mail* printed day after day one of Macdonald’s manifestoes as a model statement of the case for “Tariff Reform”; but it said nothing of these circumstances, or of what follows.

For eighteen years the policy of subsidies, direct and indirect, was maintained and developed under Conservative auspices. At the outset the existing duties were nearly doubled. In 1883 the system of iron and steel bounties was introduced. The business of consultation

and bargaining between Ministers and manufacturers came to be known as the policy of the "Red Parlour," because Sir John Macdonald used to meet the great trade magnates in a suite of apartments at the Queen's Hotel, in Toronto, known as the "Red Parlour." That great statesman, Sir Richard Cartwright, repeatedly denounced the traffic in campaign contributions and tariff privileges, but without avail. "Political corruption, the brazenness and moral squalor of the Red Parlour, the more widespread squalor that resulted therefrom in the constituencies, and the callous indifference of a well-to-do, intelligent, active, and socially influential section of the community to any and all evils or injustices in the political life of the Dominion, so long as they are able to use the politicians in power for their personal gain, did not begin to develop"—says Mr. Edward Porritt, in his "Sixty Years of Protection in Canada," a real mine of information on the whole subject—"until the system adopted in 1879 had been tried." "One of the evils of the National Policy and the system of Protection," said Sir Wilfrid Laurier, the present Premier, in 1893, "has been here, as everywhere else, to lower the moral level of public life. I speak of this subject more in sorrow than in anger; but there is not a man who has in his bosom a patriotic heart who does not see with shame that the name of Canada has become a by-word for corruption among the civilised nations of the earth."

The Tariff was revised in 1884, and again in 1894, intermediate changes, chiefly of a Protective kind, being made in ordinary budget legislation. All the time, Sir Richard Cartwright, Mr. Goldwin Smith, and other statesmen were thundering against what the first-named described as "a vast and well-organised conspiracy, which controls a very large portion of the Press of the country,

which controls a very large active part of the wealth of the country, which has the entire resources of the Government of Canada at its disposal, a conspiracy whose motto is robbery, and whose arms are fraud and bribery." "I have sat in many parliaments," Sir Richard added, "and I am sorry to say that the Parliament of which I am now a member has attained a most evil pre-eminence even among several very bad parliaments that I recollect. It has remained for this Parliament deliberately and publicly to condone the very vilest corruption that could be committed in a country having free institutions; to trample under foot the fundamental principles of law and justice; to make a mockery of judicial trials of Ministers; to allow those Ministers to be tried by judges of their own selection upon charges of their own preparation."

Two facts aggravated these evil characteristics of Canadian Protectionism. The first is that the Canadian manufacturers have deceived the ordinary citizen on both sides of the Atlantic by cloaking their selfish demands in a garb of Imperial enthusiasm. "They are adepts," says Mr. Porritt, "at making a vast system of social demoralisation and political corruption wear an altruistic aspect—adepts at all the little artifices of commercialised patriotism. As was the case when the Tariff Commission was at the cotton manufacturing town of Valleyfield, Quebec, in December, 1905, they will run up the Union Jack on the flag poles of their factories, and go before the Commission with a plea for an increased duty on cotton goods from Lancashire, on the ground that Manchester exporters are as much given to dumping as those of New England." The second fact is that, so far from sharing the tariff loot between wage-earners and manufacturers, the Government has spent hundreds of thousands of pounds in recruiting labour from oversea for Canadian factories, with the result, if not the

deliberate intention, of keeping down wages. So far as the industrial population of the Dominion is concerned, therefore, the effect of Protectionism has been to make the necessaries of life dearer, and at the same time to depress wages by the perpetual introduction of new supplies of cheap labour. The growth of combines and trusts has followed the growth of the tariff in the same manner as in the United States, though necessarily on a smaller scale. In 1889, in 1897, and in 1907 successive Anti-Trust Acts have been carried, but with little or no effect. In November, 1906, the Crown Prosecutor of Ontario exposed the proceedings of nearly forty Trusts in an inquiry at Toronto.

In 1896 the original National Policy Party was overthrown; but, although Sir Wilfrid Laurier and the Liberals have been in power since that period, no considerable modification has been made in the tariff, with the exception of the preferential rates to Great Britain, the advantage of which to England has been considerably reduced by the recent Canadian agreements with Germany and the United States. Sir Wilfrid Laurier has neither reduced the burden which the duties inflict upon the mass of the people, nor checked the process of capitalistic combination and parliamentary corruption by which those burdens are maintained. "Never, in all the history of Canada," Mr. Joseph Martin, K.C., of Vancouver, told the International Free Trade Congress in 1908, "has there been so much corruption in public life as in the last twelve years. It has permeated every department of the Government; and it is safe to say that much the greater part of the time of Parliament is taken up with investigating charges of graft and corruption against departmental officers and Ministers of the Crown." Mr. Martin charges the Government with employing every means to suppress or nullify the investigations of parliamentary

committees, trafficking in railway concessions, improperly alienating public lands and franchises, and using their election funds to ostracise independent Members of Parliament who may attempt to oppose and expose their proceedings.

It must be a source of constant surprise that in Canada, under a Liberal Government, with a population the vast majority of which, and especially the farming class, is interested in free imports, there has been for so many years no effective expression of Free Trade feeling. The explanation lies in the fact that the Liberal Government not merely adopted a mildly Protectionist policy, despite all its previous pledges, but gradually became enmeshed in the whole of the corrupt processes by which everywhere Protectionism is maintained. The beneficiaries of the tariff and bounty system, railway financiers and contractors, subsidy hunters of all kinds, wealthy men seeking seats in the Senate to maintain the methods by which they obtained their wealth, are necessary pillars of party finance. Despite the parliamentary rules, civil servants become the election agents of the men to whom they owe their appointments. The Post Office and Customs houses, the offices of the railways and the great dock and harbour works, are the channels by which Government favour percolates downward, debauching a considerable proportion of the town population. Government advertising and printing contracts are a means of directly controlling the newspaper Press, a large part of which is already governed by captains of industry who depend upon bounties and tariff privilege. Thus the farming and industrial classes are practically without means of publicity and organisation. In commenting upon the fact that the Tariff revision of 1906 was dictated by the Canadian Manufacturers' Association, and that a good deal of the British preference has since then been whittled away,

Mr. Edward Porritt expresses the opinion that there can now never be in Canada a fair consideration of such a system of reciprocity as our Tariff "Reformers" propose. "Confronted with such a proposition, the people of Canada, as a whole, would be as little considered as they admittedly were when the tariff was revised in 1906. The question for Ministers at Ottawa would be how such a reduction of duties on English goods would affect the hold of this Minister over this province; how it would affect the next election in that constituency; what campaign subscriptions would be endangered, or what daily newspaper, controlled by a millionaire captain of industry, might be thrown into opposition. Tariff politics, in a word, are obviously and essentially the most unsocial and most provincial of petty politics. They set every man's hand against his neighbour; class against class; farmers and importers against manufacturers; coal producers against coal consumers; province against province; and Colonial manufacturers against manufacturers in the Motherland."

Everywhere, in fact, Protection introduces a virulent poison into political and economic life. In China, and in Turkey before the Revolution, there could be no regular development of foreign trade and healthy intercourse until the Customs houses had been removed from the control of mandarins and pashas who took toll of trade after the manner of mediæval pirates. In Russia, the tariff is a machine of wholesale robbery, by which some of the grossest features of the ancient despotism are perpetuated. At the other end of the political scale, in the Australian Commonwealth, a bastard form of democracy is attempting to establish itself by the diversion of some portion of the tariff loot to the betterment of conditions in sweated workshops. We have seen during our fiscal controversies what grave division of interest Tariff "Reform" would set

up between different parts of the Empire. Perhaps the gravest of the influences it would create would lie in the secret and illicit channels by which the bargaining between Westminster and the Colonial Parliaments would be carried on. It is a curious fact that the large and increasing sums of money spent on advertisement by the Protectionist Colonies chiefly gravitate to the Protectionist Press in the United Kingdom, of whose revenues they now constitute a not inconsiderable part. This advertisement business already exerts a subtle but pervasive influence upon the treatment of Colonial subjects in British newspapers. The accompanying reading matter which is published is usually of an official or a semi-official character. If this does not amount to an actual subsidy of Protectionist opinion, it is, at any rate, far from being the independent description of affairs for which the innocent reader takes it. No serious citizen can look without concern upon the possibility of a more systematic introduction into Britain of the methods by which, in the cases I have described above, the healthy course of public life has been diverted, and the virtue of an honest and alert public opinion has been destroyed.





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